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IN MEMORIAM.

EDMUND ALEXANDER PARKES:

An Address,

READ BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MEDICAL SOCIETY,

ON TUESDAY, MAY 2ND, 1876,

BY

JOHN ORSBORN, M.D.,


FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND; FELLOW OF THE MEDICAL
SOCIETY OF LONDON; PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MEDICAL SOCIETY;
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTHERN BRANCH OF THE
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EDMUND ALEXANDER PARKES.

MR. VICE-PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,

A sad and solemn duty has devolved upon me ; Death has achieved a victory, and Science has lost a distinguished son. From the lofty eminence of a great reputation, from the pleasant fields of scientific research, from the platform of a wide and sympathetic philanthropy, from a world enriched by his labours and made better by his presence, a great and good man has descended into the valley of the Shadow of Death, and his place can know him no more. Edmund Alexander Parkes was no ordinary man, his career was no ordinary career, his virtues were of no ordinary kind, his singleness of purpose and uprightness of heart were clear as the noonday.

In the strength of his intellect, in the purity of his motives, in the nobility of his aims, he stood out unconsciously conspicuous from amongst his fellow-men, radiant with a brightness, and glowing with a perfection such as few mortals have attained. Respect and admiration were the

voluntary offerings of all who knew him, whilst not a few were inspired with the deeper feelings of a sacred friendship and love. Envy and malice stood abashed in his presence, and despaired of accomplishing a flight so lofty as that of the eminence on which he habitually dwelt. In him it seemed almost as if nature had determined on manifesting to his fellows, to how great a measure of perfection she could attain in the individual, by the full exercise of her highest powers. With an intellect exceptionally fine there was combined a character transparently beautiful; so fine, so beautiful, that it were altogether vain to attempt a judicial estimate of the one or the other. As well might we endeavour to make clear by description the surpassing brilliancy of the diamond, or the exquisite beauties of some great triumph of art. Physically, morally, intellectually he was of surpassing comeliness, and there went forth from his presence a bright and chastening influence that fell softly, as moonlight on the waters, upon the spirit of others.

Powers there are

That touch each other to the quick—in modes
Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive,
No soul to dream of.

Not a few could bear testimony to a consciousness of such influence similar to that borne by one of his early friends. "I never," said he, "went round the wards of the Hospital with Dr. Parkes without wishing to be a better man, and not only so, but I felt that I might become such." Evidence to

the beauty of his character is scarcely demanded ; it shone forth so conspicuously as to proclaim at once its presence and its power ; still it is a pleasure sometimes, and seems to gratify a want, to express the emotions of the heart, audibly, even though imperfectly, in forms of speech, although we may at the best be constrained to exclaim

I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel ;
For words, like nature half reveal
And half conceal the soul within.

Sir William Jenner, after one of his kind and more than friendly visits, said to me with much feeling, “ I have known him from his boyhood, and I have always regarded him as the most perfect character that has ever come within the range of my observation.” Now there are characters that are inherently, innately good, upon which the dark shadows of evil have never fallen ; there are other characters, which for the establishment of a greater or less perfection, have had to undergo morally the fiery ordeal of wellnigh self-annihilation ; fierce passions have had to be quelled by a strong will, and subdued by an ever-watchful discipline ; a purified and exalted nature being the reward of victory, and so illustrating the poetic conception that

Men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

With Dr. Parkes no such victory had to be achieved ; he belonged to the former class, and we may truthfully assume that at no period of his life had his tender,

gentle, susceptible nature received the imprint of aught that was evil,

For nought of ill his heart could understand.

The rays of life, from whatever points they may have converged, as they impinged on his pure nature became of necessity blended into the one white ray of "sweetness and light." Physically fragile, he was morally and intellectually one of the strongest of men; the frail frame that seemed to have so feeble a hold on life was ennobled by a soul that knew only high resolves, and animated with a mind to obey its lofty behests.

In memory's inmost recesses, in the mind's eye, will long dwell the vision of that finely-shapen brow, on which was stamped in unmistakable characters, "Intellect," "Intellect;" of those exquisitely chiselled features, of that soft yet penetrating gaze, of that expression, having less of earth in it than heaven—a true index to the mind within—of that assemblage of characteristics, to which but few of the sons of men are born to be heirs; and behind all this there dwelt a steadfastness of purpose, an energy for labour, an inflexible will, an uncompromising devotion to truth and duty. Expediency found no dwelling-place amongst his motives, and policy usurped not the place of righteous dealing. It was these characteristics, orb'd into a perfect whole, which gave him the commanding influence he possessed. That he might err in judgment was a condition he shared in common with all mankind; that his principles were at fault, or that he could swerve from the path of rec-

titude no one ever ventured to suggest. The contemplation of a moral beauty such as his is good for the spirit of man, for as it has been well said, "To exercise the imagination on the lives of great and good men, brings with it a double gain; for by this exercise we learn at a single stroke, and in the most effective way, both what was done and what ought to be done," and to aim at a high ideal not unfrequently engenders the faculties with which to attain to it, kindles a desire for the beautiful and the good, and purifies the soul of some of its earthly dross. It was the high prerogative of him whose loss we now deplore to have realized this ideal perfection; to have attained to a height of moral greatness which gave to his opinions a weight, and to his character an influence, which never failed in making themselves felt in all matters submitted to his judgment individually, or in concert with others. His was the voice that stilled the raging waters of tempestuous discussion; the voice that was heard only on the side of reason and of right; that could calmly exclaim, when in deliberation on a momentous question, where expediency and right seemed to be in conflict, "Let the Institution perish, but let us do only the thing that is right." These high moral qualities won for him universal respect and admiration, they were known and appreciated far and wide, and their general recognition led to his being regarded as "the most popular man in the Profession;" such hold had he obtained on the hearts of his brethren. But it was those only who had

the privilege of an intimate acquaintance with him, who could fully estimate his high moral worth; who could see in their full measure those qualities which illumined his daily life, and made it

“A thing of beauty, a joy for ever,”

qualities which were to him, as a crown of glory, a rich diadem, worn nobly, but with that true humility which ever attends upon worth and greatness; for he well knew that “the scornful nostril and the high head gather not the odours that lie on the track of truth.” Highly sensitive, his moral nature was tremulous to the finest impulse for good, and vibrated in unison with all lofty thought and purity of conduct; and yet with such sensitiveness it was adamant in its tenacity and strength of purpose.

In full consonance with his moral nature was his intellectual. Gifted beyond most men he addressed himself earnestly to the interrogation of nature, and strove to wring from her by patient enquiry solutions of some of her most difficult problems. The careful training of his early life fitted him for such enquiries. Those of his fellow students, of which number I had the privilege of being one, who will flit back on the wings of memory to their College days, will have no difficulty in reviving a remembrance of him as he daily appeared in the Medical School and Hospital of University College. I see him before me now, with his slight figure, his fine features, his “good” expression, his gentle unassuming manner, his steady

and earnest devotion to his work ; characteristics which won for him, even then, the affectionate allegiance of not a few of those around him. I had not at that time the happiness and advantage of being one of his intimate friends. I could nevertheless admire him at a distance and appreciate his high qualities. It was clear even at that time that he was destined for no ordinary career, that he possessed the requisites for obtaining high, if not the highest, distinction in the profession to which he was devoting himself. No small advantage accrued to him from the advice, assistance, and support given to him by his uncle, the late Dr. A. T. Thomson, who was then one of the professors at the College, and physician to the Hospital. But he had at all times easy access to each and all of the other professors, whose respect he won, and whose interest he secured. His steady application, his receptive mind, his high intelligence, secured for him a successful career as a student, and so far as the acquisition of prizes and rewards can indicate intellectual status, we may justly infer from the number of these that fell to his lot, that his attainments were even then of a high order, an inference fully justified by his subsequent career. From the notices that have appeared in the several Medical Journals we have all become tolerably familiar with the history of his early professional life. It was in 1840 that he became a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of London, and in 1841 he passed the examination for M.B. at the University of London,

having taken honours in anatomy and physiology, in chemistry, in materia medica, and comparative anatomy. Now the acquisition of these honours in those days was indicative of great industry, and of high acquirements; for it was a very large School of Medicine, in which competition was keen, and competitors numerous—amongst these being several who made for themselves, in later years, a name and reputation of no mean order. In estimating the honours he then acquired, we must not forget that they were won on a hard-fought field, against opponents not easily vanquished. From the Hospital he entered the Army as Assistant-Surgeon of the 84th regiment, from which he retired after a service of three years. But this brief period yielded him opportunities of enlarging the boundaries of medical science, by contributions on Dysentery and Cholera, which were rich in important facts and inferences, and were the prelude to other labours of the highest value. Upon these I need not now dwell; every individual familiar in the smallest degree with the literature of our profession will readily call to mind the subjects that have received elucidation from his researches, prominent among his scientific contributions being his Gullstonian Lectures on Pyrexia, his Croonian Lectures on the Elimination of Nitrogen, wherein he has ably and clearly set forth the view that the liver is a centre of urea formation; his papers in the Transactions of the Royal Society, on the elimination of

Nitrogen during muscular activity, and on the effects of Alcohol on the system; his exhaustive article on Influenza, in Reynolds' System of Medicine; and last, though not least, his elaborate work on Practical Hygiene, which at once took full possession of the minds of all interested in the subjects of which it treats, and was admitted to be the most complete, comprehensive, and accurate treatise that had ever been published; and it must, I think, be conceded that to his efforts we are mainly indebted for the position to which the study of Hygiene has attained in this country, and for the general and practical application of its principles that now obtains. His authority and teaching gave to it an influence that eventually became irresistible, and the laws of health are now no longer shrouded in an ignorance worthy of the dark ages. Ignorance has been in a measure vanquished. There yet remain the foci of prejudice, parsimony, and cruel indifference.

It is impossible, within the time at my disposal, to refer to his numerous other labours; to the services publicly known, and others not publicly known, that he was constantly rendering to the Government, to his unwearied application to the duties in connection with his Professorship, to the extensive correspondence that his reputation entailed upon him from all parts of the world, and to the many other duties which he voluntarily assumed whenever he thought he could render useful aid. It would, however, be a great

omission if I were to pass by, without mention, the important services he rendered to the Profession in his capacity as member of the Medical Council, to which he was appointed by the Government ; an indication of the estimation in which his judgment and abilities were held by those in authority. It is now familiar knowledge that there at one time prevailed a great laxity, or at all events, great imperfection in the system of examination pursued by some of the medical examining bodies, and that for the greater care, and the more rigid tests now generally adopted, we are indebted, if not entirely, in a very large measure, to the persistent endeavours of Dr. Parkes. This is but one instance among many of the zeal which actuated him, and on all points his views were clear, practical, and enlightened ; with him the old was not good simply because it was old, he required other reasons than simple antiquity to win his assent. To mention all the subjects in whose discussion he has taken an active part would be well-nigh to write the history of the proceedings of the Medical Council from its commencement. His services have passed into the History of Medical Politics, and have therein made their abiding mark.

So fertile and versatile was his mind that he was equally at home with his subject, whether demonstrating some deep matter of science, or leading captive an audience with some popular lecture. There was the same impressive yet gentle manner, the easy flow of graceful speech, illustration apt and appropriate, con-

clusions logical, facts unimpeachable. Facts were the staple food of his intellectual life, he cared little for theories ; and left these to be woven by others. I do not remember a single theory that will be associated with his name, but many and important are the facts that are, and will be long so associated, and be regarded as stable elements in the fabric of science. The tendency of his mind was analytical, not synthetical ; and he cared not to soar into the realms of speculation lest the fate of Icarus might befall him. He was scrupulously exact in the acquisition of facts, and judicially calm and impartial in their interpretation. He required that his facts should be real facts, that they should stand out as it were four-square to the light of day, and be visible to every beholder. As I have already said, he cared little for theories or speculative opinions ; they were alien to his mental constitution, and could not be assimilated. Zealous in the pursuit of Truth for Truth's sake, he feared lest her fair form might be obscured by being clad in an attractive yet delusive apparel of hypothetical speculation. A charming and thoughtful writer of our own day, the late late Sir A. Helps, has well observed "More stress ought to be laid than has been on the intellectual requisites for truth, which are probably the best part of intellectual cultivation ; and as much caused by truth as causing it," for "Truth, which is one of the largest creatures, opens out the way to the heights of enjoyment, as well as to the depths of self-denial." I remember quite well

on one occasion when I read a Paper before this Society on "Alcohol" his first enquiry of me on our way home together was "Why did you not give us more facts, such as those you have related to me in conversation, and less of theory?" And he then pointed out to me, in his kind and considerate manner, two or three errors into which I had fallen in quoting certain authorities in support of my opinions, whose statements had been controverted by subsequent experiments and observations. And it was, perhaps, fortunate for science that he was not wedded to theories, inasmuch as his great powers were not wasted in the attempted verification of doubtful or altogether groundless hypotheses, but were left to expend their full vigor and acumen in releasing from the tangled web of phenomena, coherent and congruous data, which, in the alembic of his acute intellect, became crystallised into transparent facts which were forthwith incorporated into the general mass of scientific knowledge. His experiments and observations on the effect of alcohol on the system, and on the elimination of urea, are models of the method in which such enquiries should be conducted; and although the results obtained from the experiments on alcohol would have been deemed sufficient by many to justify the enunciation of a decided opinion, he nevertheless, in spite of his personal convictions, restrained himself from giving utterance to any views for whose support and justification the evidence seemed to him to be inadequate. And amongst the many other causes for regret at his

premature decease, this is not the least, that a question of such vital importance as the use of alcohol in health and disease cannot now have the advantage of his inestimable labours in its elucidation. The obscurity and uncertainty which have so long prevailed will still continue to prevail, for a time at least, and that which might have been made clear by the light of his intellect, will now probably have to struggle into existence through the mists of prejudice and the adverse influence of traditional authority, inveterate habit, and gustatory indulgence. Though fully aware that "the original and proper sources of knowledge are not books, but life, experience, personal thinking, feeling, and acting," he was nevertheless a great reader, reading for the purpose of enlarging his views and conquering personal prejudices, those "idols of the cave," as Bacon terms them, which are so apt to stand in the way of methodical and impartial observation. But he attached to books no undue value, and yielded not up to authority the independence of his own intellectual powers. He felt with the Poet

The parchment roll is that the holy river,
From which one draught shall slake the thirst for ever !
The quickening power of science only he
Can know, from whose own soul it gushes free.

The rapidity and ease with which he could master the contents of a volume constituted in him a remarkable gift, and evinced a great power of memory ; and it was a great privilege to listen to his clear and accurate resume of the contents of a work after its perusal. It was not in the power of any author to lead him captive

in the chains of a fascinating and seductive eloquence ; his judgment would assert its supremacy, and conviction required for its realization, logical conclusions flowing from unimpeachable premises. From this honesty of purpose and scientific caution there sprang up that general and entire confidence in all that he said and did which was but a just tribute to the majesty of Truth, as it sat enthroned in the beautiful temple of his serene mind.

And let us not forget that this great and good man was one of ourselves—that our Profession claims him specially as its own ; and we are proud to know and feel that he was pre-eminently the skilled and accomplished Physician. It was in the pursuit of medicine as a science and an art that his great powers became developed, and as a dutiful and grateful son, he reflected back on the science, in whose fields he had achieved great triumphs, a glory and honour that will long remain. We, the members of this society, ought especially to revere his memory. No longer ago than last year he occupied this Presidential chair, and gave to our meetings a weight and an *eclat* which his presence never failed to impart. He always manifested a deep interest in our proceedings, and during his period of office he spared no pains or trouble in promoting the objects we have in view. Not one amongst us can have forgotten the able, eloquent, and practical address on the study of Therapeutics, which at a very short notice he delivered as our annual address. In our

discussions his opinions were listened to with great attention, and were regarded with the highest interest. When a failure of health unhappily interfered with his regular attendance, he did not cease to take an interest in our society, but rendered us all the aid he could, and it was to him a matter of deep regret when he was no longer able to be personally present amongst us. As an illustration of such interest, as well as of his kindness of heart, and self abnegation, I will read to you a letter that I received from one of our members this morning only. Dr. Griffin, writing from Weymouth, thus expresses himself:—

Weymouth, May 1st, 1876.

My dear Orsborn,

I much regret not being able to hear your paper on poor Parkes. I, however, cannot refrain from bearing my testimony to the great and quite uncalled for kindness which he has on more than one occasion shown to me. It was at his suggestion I wrote the last annual address, some of the outcomes of which were the previous pamphlet on "Pauperism," the establishment of the Charity Organisation Society, and the opening of the eyes of the Southampton public to the evils of the present system of charity. It was at Dr. Parkes' suggestion those pamphlets were printed. During their composition he *frequently*, and *unasked*, sent me quotations from papers, books, and other sources, as well as books and blue books of other nations which he thought might be of assistance. To a man in his position to have troubled to look out and send books if asked for them would have been a great kindness, but in every instance to have done so without having been once asked by me, shows a sympathy with other men in their work as rare as it is divine.

With kind regards, believe me,

Yours sincerely,

R. W. WAUDBY GRIFFIN.

Although a failure of health in his earlier career led to a disappointment of legitimate and justifiable hopes,

at a moment when a great prize, in the way of professional advancement and personal distinction, was well nigh within his grasp, he nevertheless remained faithful to his calling, and his allegiance did not for a moment waver. He was content to pursue the even tenor of his way, although this lay in other fields wherein, if there may have been less of pomp and circumstance, Nature was none the less willing to unfold her secrets, and Science became none the less fruitful of results. The serene depths of his mind were not permanently disturbed; at the most they were but broken into transient ripples, and a strong sense of duty soon restored them to their wonted calm.

I have said that he was a skilled and accomplished Physician. Every one who has had an opportunity of seeing him in this capacity will at once re-echo this sentiment. His gentleness and sympathy at the bedside were in keeping with his entire character, and the fullest consideration for the convenience and sufferings of the patient influenced all his proceedings, yet his high sense of the importance of his vocation would not suffer him to be content with a perfunctory and superficial examination. Guided by an extensive knowledge of disease, he soon perceived the salient points of a case, and with much address and exact method proceeded to its investigation. He was not ashamed to recognize and confess difficulties, nor would he assume a knowledge he did not possess, and so cover by a confident dogmatism, a lack that might really be the result

of the, as yet, imperfect condition of medical science. Such difficulties, however, were few, and in the majority of instances, he succeeded in making obscure points less obscure, clear points more clear, until that which may have been hitherto a perplexing fragmentary history became woven into a connected whole, through which was seen the true nature of the disease. He was scrupulously careful in arriving at a diagnosis, and was commensurately accurate. His suggestions for treatment were based on extensive practical experience, and were generally crowned with success, at least in those cases which had not passed beyond the limits of our art. He inspired patients with confidence, secured their gratitude by his patient attention, and won their esteem by his gentle and sympathizing manner. His whole demeanour in a sick room was indicative of the Man of Feeling and the Man of Knowledge, and was in every way worthy of imitation; in his whole bearing there was seen the kind and accomplished physician, the in-born gentleman. Speecially with regard to him might have been written those fine verses which we read in Ecclesiasticus "Honour a Physician with the honour due unto him, for the uses which ye may have of him, for the Lord hath created him. For of the most High cometh healing, and he shall receive honour of the King. The skill of the physician shall lift up his head, and in the sight of great men he shall be in admiration" (Eccles. chap. 38).

But the end hath now come upon all this greatness,

all this goodness ; his sun hath gone down while it was yet day ;

The shadow cloak'd from head to foot,
Who keeps the keys of all the creeds

hath encompassed him, and given to the Grave, the victory.

As in life so in death—its long forecast shadows had for him no terrors, they brought upon his soul no gloom, nor did they eclipse the brightness, nor disturb the calmness of his stable mind. When in the course of his protracted illness there at length stood clearly revealed before him “the shadow feared of men,” he quailed not, neither did he mourn ; it was to him but a veil behind which he expected and hoped to see beautiful realities, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. The grave was to him but the portal to those bright regions where he would no longer see things as in a glass darkly, but behold them face to face ; when with enlarged powers, greater capacity for good, and exalted purity, knowledge will no more present itself to the mind in the bud only, but will blossom with a fulness and beauty that shall satisfy the soul’s longings. The sacred precincts of death’s chamber must not be rudely invaded, nor ought the revelations—the holy aspirations of life’s last days to be lightly disclosed. I may, however, without transgression say, for the satisfaction of not a few, that Edmund Alexander Parkes, this good man, was endued with a deep religious

feeling, and a firm faith ; mysteries which to many are a stumbling-block and rock of offence, were received by him in a child-like spirit, and afforded him no small measure of consolation. His acceptance of religious truths was not a simple passive assent to certain dogmatic teaching, but was the outgrowth of patient thought and enquiry. Within a comparatively recent period, before his health had begun to fail, he had given no small amount of time to the investigation of the historical proofs of the death and resurrection of Christ, with the result of establishing a firm faith in his own mind in the Gospel narratives ; and had his life been spared, amongst other important works it is highly probable that he might have given to the world one embodying the results of his calm and dispassionate enquiry into this subject. But alas, the hand has dropped, and the voice is still ! There were lessons to be learned from his death as from his life :—Fortitude, resignation, meekness, patience, gentleness ; and as we watched his slow descent to the yawning grave we felt that fell disease had seldom slain a nobler victim. Few death-beds have been so beautiful ; murmurings and repinings were heard not ; but the voice of gratitude resounded with an earnestness that gave a yet sweeter savour to the duties of friendship and affection. If ever to any one, to this estimable man might it have been permitted to say with St. Paul “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

This imperfect estimate of his character and work, uttered in the feeble accents of one who loved him as a brother, will not be regarded as the exaggerations of ardent friendship, but as a truthful though inadequate testimony to his transcendent worth, nor will it be assumed

That the haze of grief
Makes former gladness loom so great.

Or that the past will always win
A glory from its being far ;
And orb into the perfect star
We saw not when we moved therein.

Amongst the green spots in memory's waste some of the greenest and loveliest will be those whereon rest the recollections of my friendship and intercourse with this wise and gifted man, the influence of whose holy life may, I trust, have wrought for good upon one far less worthy.

I cannot refrain from incorporating with this imperfect effort of my own the following tribute, so beautifully expressed, to the memory of him whose loss we now deplore. In a letter very recently addressed to me, our late President, Mr. Dayman, thus expresses himself:—"It is said that the pure in heart shall see God. It is permitted only to such men as Parkes to penetrate nature's Holy of Holies ; to interpret the hidden meanings of the Author of our existence, and thus to come as it were face to face with the Deity. We ordinary mortals fall short of this privilege ' Non lucem, sed lucidas res videmus.' The great men of the

earth with their true humility see more than luminous things merely. They spend their lives under the sunlight of truth. Many fall victims beneath its rays, and, like Milton, become 'dark with excess of light.' The name of Edmund Parkes appears as the youngest martyr on the calendar of science. My personal grief must be of necessity ephemeral, for he has bequeathed to me a bright and beautiful memory. You, my friend, will long dwell in sorrow on your loss. In this I can sympathize with you, but the evil days will pass away from you, and by-and-by you will only think of the inestimable benefits your soul has reaped by having been brought in contact with a spirit so intellectual, so noble, so pure as that of Edmund Parkes."

Edmund Alexander Parkes ! Science mourns for you as one of her noblest sons ; your Profession laments you as one of its brightest ornaments ; your friends, grieve for you as for a brother ; your country knows not yet the full measure of its loss ; sorrow must endure for a season, but joy cometh in the morning, joy buoyant on the wings of hope that you will reap your reward.

POSTSCRIPT.

I cannot refrain from adding as a Postscript the following extract from a biographical notice of Dr. Parkes, by Baron Mundy, of the University of Vienna :—"All the armies of the Continent should, at parade, lower their standards craped, if only for a moment, because the founder and best teacher of military hygiene of our day, the friend and benefactor of every soldier, Edmund Parkes, is no more."